

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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TAGS: ETRN, FR

SUBJECT: CIVAIR: CONCORDE'S RETURN

REF: PARIS 24626

1. SUMMARY. PRESS HERALDS CONCORDE FEAT IN CROSSING ATLANTIC IN THREE AND HALF HOURS. THIS AND SATISFACTION AT RECEPTION IN US DO NOT OBSCURE AWARENESS OF STILL UNCERTAIN COMMERCIAL FUTURE OF CONCORDE. BAC CONFIRMS PRELIMINARY TALKS UNDERWAY WITH BRANIFF. FAVORABLE US RECEPTION WOULD SEEM ONCE AND FOR ALL TO LAY TO REST ANY FRENCH SUSPICION OF ANTI-CONCORDE BIAS ON PART OF US. END SUMMARY

2. CONCORDE FEAT IN LINKING WASHINGTON, DC AND PARIS IN 3 HOUR 33 MINUTE FLIGHT IS HERALDED BY FRENCH PRESS AS HISTORIC USHERING IN OF THE ERA OF COMMERCIAL SUPERSONIC TRANSPORT. (TWO HOURS AND 44 MINUTES OF FLIGHT WERE AT SUPERSONIC SPEED.)

PROUD REACTION TO CONCORDE'S SPEED RECORD PARTLY OVERSHADOWS BUT DOES NOT OBSURE EVIDENT SATISFACTION AT SUCCESS OF CONCORDE'S TOUR, AND ESPECIALLY WARM RECEPTION IN US. FAVORABLE COMMENTARY IN UNCLASSIFIED

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"HITHERTO ANTI-SST" WASHINGTON POST IS SINGLED OUT

AS ESPECIALLY REVELATORY OF REACTION IN US, WHERE ANTI-COCORDE CAMPAIGN DID NOT DEVELOP AND, ON CONTRARY, WIDESPREAD POPULAR INTEREST DISPLAYED IN CONCORDE AT DALLAS AS AT WASHINGTON IS INTERPRETED AS REVEALING SURPRINSIGLY LARGE MEASURE OF PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE. LE MONDE WRITES THAT CONCORDE VISIT HAS CONSOLED THOSE AMERICANS WHO CONSIDER CONGRESS WAS WRONG IN CUTTING OFF FUNDS FOR SST DEVELOPMENT, WITH RESULT THAT ONE EFFECT OF VISIT COULD BE PARADOXICALLY TO STRENGTHEN THE CASE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AN EVENTUAL AMERICAN RIVAL TO CONCORCDE

3. PRESS IS NOT ENTIRELY CARRIED AWAY BY EMOTION, HOWEVER, AND THERE ARE SOME HARD REMINDERS THAT PUBLIC RELATIONS SUCCESSES DON'T NECESSARILY MEAN AIRCRAFT SALES. L'AUORE WRITES: "CONCORDE'S 'RECORD' IS PARTLY SPORTING EAT. BUT, AOS, IT IS NOT BY SPORTS THAT BUSINESS IS CONDUCTED. THE PLANE'S QUALITIES HAVE BEEN KNOWN FOR A LONG TIME AND ARE NOW ONLY CONFIRMED. BUT AT ORLY, NO ONE DARED MENTION THE NUMBER OF PLANES SOLD. IT REMAINS HOPELESSLY FIXED AT NINE." LE MONDE SUBSTITLES ITS STORY: "AMERICAN CONSECRATION WHILE AWAITING THE ORDERS." LE MONDE NOTES THAT WHILE THE FLIGHT SHOWED THAT CONCORDE CAN LIVE UP TO ITS TECHNICAL PROMISE, IT IS YET TO BE SHOWN THAT AMERICAN AIRLINES AND BANKS ARE CONVINCED OF THE FUTURE OF CIVIL SUPERSONIC TRANSPORT. HENCE, CONTINUES LE MONDE, THE FRENCH AND BRITISH GOVERNMENTS ARE STILL FACED WITH THE NEED TO DECIDE SOON WHETHER OR NOT TO CUT BACK THE RATE OF PRODUCTION OF CONCORDE. NO DATE FOR TAKING OF THIS DECISION IS LIKELY TO BE AGREED TO ON THE FRENCH SIDE UNTIL AFTER SUBMISSION TO PRIME MINISTER MESSMER ON NOVEMBER 30 OF A SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE REPORT THAT HAS BEEN COMMISSIONED ON THE ENTIRE CONCORDE PROJECT, ACCORDING TO LE MONDE.

4. AT PRESS CONFERENCE AT ORLY FOLLOWING CONCORDE'S ARRIVAL, GEOFFREY KNIGHT OF BAC CONFIRMED THAT PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS HAD BEEN INITAIED WITH BRANIFF BUT THESE HAD NOT PROGRESSED TO POINT WHERE ONE COULD SPEAK OF POSSIBLE SALE OR LEASING AND, IN FACT, CONSTRUCTORS HAD YET TO MAKE DEFINITE OFFER TO BRANIFF.

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(PRESS ALSO SPECULATES ON POSSIBLE POOLING ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN BRANIFF AND BAC/AIR FRANCE FOR US-SOUTH AMERICAN ROUTE.) KNIGHT SAID THAT CONSTRUCTORS HAD "REMAINED IN TOUCH" PANAM AND TWA DESPITE DROPPING OF OPTIONS BY THESE CARRIERS, THOUGH THERE HAD BEEN NO CONTACTS WITH THEM DURING CONCORDE VISIT TO U.S

5. IN REMARKS TO PRESS, ZIEGLER OF AEROSPATIALE STRESSED THAT FLIGHT HAD CONFIRMED CONCORDE'S

PERFORMANCE CHARACTERISTICS AND HAD DEMONSTRATED AIRCRAFT'S RELIABILITY AND COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL. LATHIERE, DIRECTOR OF AIR TRANSPORT OF SGAC, EXPRESSED CONVICTION CONCORDE WOULD BE MONEY-MAKER FOR AIRLINES WHICH OPERATED IT. DEFENSE MINISTER GALLEY EMPHASIZED POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EUROPEAN COOPERATION THAT HAD MADE JOINT DEVELOPMENT OF CONCORDE POSSIBLE.

6. ZIEGLER AND LATHIERE WERE BEAMING AS THEY DESCENDED FROM PLANE ON ARRIVAL AND CLEARLY CONSIDERED VISIT HAD BEEN TREMENDOUS SUCCESS. MOOD OF EUPHORIA CARRIED OVER TO PRESS CONFERENCE WHICH HAD ALL THE AURA OF POST-GAME VICTORY CELEBRATION. MINISTER STONE AND AIRA WERE ON HAND TO GREET GALLEY AND RCAA WAS ALSO PRESENT AMONG LARGE GROUP OF GOF AND AIR FRANCE OFFICIALS AND FRENCH AND BRITISH NEWSMEN MEETING THE FLIGHT.

7. COMMENT. AS RESULT OF FAVORABLE RECEPTION CONCORDE RECEIVED IN US, ANY LINGERING FRENCH SUSPICIONS THAT ANTI-CONCORDE BIAS EXISTS IN US WOULD NOW SEEM TO HAVE DEFINITELY

BEEN PUT TO REST. IN THE PAST, FOLLOWING PANAM AND TWA CANCELLATION OF THEIR OPTIONS AND THE BANNING OF SUPERSONIC FLIGHT BY CIVIL AIRCRAFT OVER THE US, IT WAS PERHAPS COMFORTING FOR SOME FRENCH TO PRETEND TO SEE THE US PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROBLEMS THAT HAVE PLAGUED THE CONCORDE PROGRAM. BUT THE PUBLIC RELATIONS BENEFITS OF THE CONCORDE FLIGHT TO THE US WORK BOTH WAYS, AND IN THE FUTURE IT WILL BE MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE FRENCH TO BLAME US FOR CONCORDE'S TROUBLES. IRWIN

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